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NICARAGUA/
FIGHTING

BROKAW: Meanwhile the Nicaraguan government said today that 12 civilians and government soldiers were killed in a new offensive by rebels, rebels backed by the CIA, according to the Nicaraguan government. And at the State Department tonight, Fred Francis has learned more about those two Americans killed in a rebel helicopter three days ago. Fred, were they CIA mercenaries?

FRANCIS: No, Tom, they were not. They weren't with the CIA, under contract or mercenaries looking for a buck. They were just some good ole' boys from Alabama and Tennessee, Vietnam veterans who went down there to volunteer their services to teach some special warfare training. They flew down in their own plane about 10 days ago from the Huntsville, Ala., area, loaded with about \$5,000 worth of boots, medicines and clothing. One senior rebel leader told me today that they were just gung-ho Americans who wanted the smell of communism up close.

BROKAW: But surely the CIA knew that they were there.

FRANCIS: No, the CIA did not know. The CIA learned early Sunday morning from press reports coming out of Nicaragua. The CIA frantically had to call Miami and Honduras to find out what was going on. Ever since Congress cut the CIA off, cut off that \$80 million pipeline to the rebels down there, the CIA has slowly lost control of this group, and this group, the rebels, have been running around this country, working on groups from Huntsville, Ala., San Diego, San Francisco, trying to raise the \$700,000 a month to keep that little war going.

BROKAW: And the identification not yet released, I gather.

FRANCIS: Two men, one a Huntsville, Ala., policeman, another a contractor from Tennessee, another was a fruit vendor from Huntsville, Ala., and the group about 14-15 people all together.

BROKAW: Thanks very much, Fred Francis at the State Department.